1: Hamburger E-4,5 (1934) 1827 SV3 Haiti SV2
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possible to gain a historical perspective of the valley in which our interest centers. As late as 1702, he tells us, only a few individuals were settled there, and these were mainly hunters and herders, since the policy of that day, based on the official belief that the future of the valley lay in using to the full its grazing resources rather than in the development of agriculture, caused all agricultural activity to be prohibited. Two decades later, however, when the cultivation of indigo had been successfully introduced, agricultural development proceeded apace. In 1739, in addition to more than a score of indigo-production centers, the valley boasted of numerous coffee, cotton, and cocoa plantations, and by 1789 was a recognized agricultural region.

But for the fact that the great plantations are no longer there, this aspect of life in Mirebalais has been little changed by revolutions and the abolition of slavery. Indigo, of course, has lost its place as an important product, while maize is now among the most significant crops, as might be looked for in the change from a plantation system to one of small individual ownership which was brought about by Haitian independence. But cotton and sugar-cane are still major crops, and coffee, which grows well on the mountainsides, is largely cultivated.

Moreau de St. Mery, writing in 1789, speaks of the French who peopled the valley as "still showing the traits which marked the early colonials. They are good, frank, brave, and opposed to all coercion." In 1723 "they marched with others from the district of the Artibonite" in an uprising against the arbitrary policies of the French West Indies Company, which Charlevoix, one of the first historians of Haiti, so vividly described.[3] In 1729 and 1736 the folk of Mirebalais defended their eastern frontier against attacks by the neighboring Spaniards; eleven years later one hundred and ten of them helped with the defense of the town of St. Louis, which was menaced by the hostile maneuvers of the British admiral

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ABOVE, *A country dwelling.*
BELOW, *A combine at work.*

[facing P. 11]

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CHAPTER IV

THE SETTING OF HAITIAN LIFE

Since the discovery by the Spaniards that the wealth of Haiti lay rather in cultivating sugar than in the exploitation of gold mines, its dominant economy has been agricultural. In the valley of Mirebalais, as elsewhere in the island, the small cultivator holds the center of the economic stage. In the main he works his own land, inherited from his father or acquired through purchase. He may also cultivate additional plots of ground which he rents, since much of the land expropriated when independence was gained was retained by the State and today is leased for nominal fees.[1]

The life of the Haitian farmer, though hard, is simple and self-contained. With but few exceptions, he supplies all his necessities, for he commands almost the entire range of techniques known to his culture; hence Haitian economy shows a lack of specialization that in the main is only relieved by the sex division of labor. The day's work begins at dawn, the women rising before the men to prepare coffee, the invariable drink of early morning. When finished with his breakfast, the farmer goes to his field, where, except for the hottest hours, he works until sundown, his one meal being brought to him at about nine or ten o'clock in the morning. His wife meanwhile occupies herself with her household tasks, pounding grain in her mortar or working in her garden near by.

L: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1936) 1937 HV3 Haiti HV3

grain in her mortar or working in her garden near by. On market days she takes the produce of the family's fields to the town to sell. If she has young children, she cares for them while she does her other work, but when they are old enough, they help her about the house if they are girls, or, if boys, go with their father to the garden. From time to time, when house repairs are needed or there are implements to be mended, the man spends a day at home getting these odd jobs done; otherwise only serious illness in the family keeps him from his fields.

The times for meals have not varied since the days when Moreau de St. Mery described the eating-habits of the slaves.[1] In addition to the mid-morning repast, the only other meal is that eaten after the man returns from his field, this being the largest of the day. A wife does not sit down with her husband, but usually eats earlier with her small children and holds herself ready to serve him upon his return, when, if he is alone, she remains to tell him the day's gossip. Visitors are often present, for peasant etiquette demands that all comers be offered food, and, as one Haitian expressed it, "The peasant would kill you for the insult if you did not share your meal with him." Bedtime, as might be expected, is early.

On Sundays and on the days of festivals this routine is interrupted, when, if the occasion is of sufficient importance and the habitation is not too far from town, the peasant and his family attend mass. On Saturday nights there is usually a *vodun* dance, when the early hour for retirement is forgotten and all-night festivities precede Sunday's rest. On such days the principal meal is eaten at three or four o'clock in the afternoon, and all the adults share it together, while at one side the children are fed from the dishes of their parents in response to the insistent repetition of the demand "*Ba'm pa'm* — give me my portion." *

* This is an example of the elision characteristic of Haitian Créole, it being abbreviated from *ba mwin part mwin* or, in French, *Donnez-moi ma part.*

L: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 HV3 Haiti SV3 Miscellaneous

The hard work of cultivating the fields is abated only during the dry season — the winter months of December to February — though even during these months there is no dearth of tasks about the house which must be cared for, such as repairs of various sorts and, above all, rethatching. There is, however, also more time for recreation than at other seasons, so that throughout the countryside there are dances and cock-fights. With February, however, work in the fields must be resumed.

The Haitian farmer does not practice any formal rotation of crops, but continues to plant a given crop in the same field until the harvest becomes perceptibly smaller than in former years, when a change is made to another type of produce. Later, when the same phenomenon is again observed, a third crop may be planted, but sooner or later the land is "put to rest," in which case it either is allowed to lie fallow or is planted with cotton, which is not thought of in the same category as other crops, but is held to be a tree, and, like other trees that of themselves spring up in a fallow field, is believed to give strength to the exhausted earth. A field of this kind remains outside cultivation as a "fallen garden" for four or five years, and the animals are allowed to enter freely and graze in it until it has become a "new garden" again.

If a field is to be made out of hitherto unworked land, or ground which has lain fallow for several years is to be cultivated once again, the work is begun by cutting down the trees. The twigs are heaped preparatory to burning them, and the larger branches and the tree-trunks are used to make fences. After the dried leaves and branches have been burned, the field is cleared of small brush, and is then ready for its initial hoeing, which, according to the crops to be planted, is sometimes delayed until some months later. Usually, however, after two or three rains have cooled and softened land that has been burned over, work continues on it. The hoeing is

done by the owner himself only if the field is very small; otherwise one of the co-operative work-groups that form such an important element in Haitian rural economy must be called.

The regulation of communal labor in Mirebalais, though extremely informal, is none the less effective. There are three or four types of such organizations, none of which requires a large outlay of funds on the part of the one whose land is being worked, and only one of which, the "mutual association," has any restriction as to membership. In this last case, three or four or five men agree to work for each other a given number of hours, rotating their working period of three hours or half a day in the fields of each of the parties to the agreement. The other co-operative groups vary principally as to their size and the time of day when their work is carried on. The smallest is the *mire*, which consists of perhaps half a dozen or ten men who come to help a neighbor in his work, and labor from early morning until about the middle of the morning. A somewhat larger group, who work from about this time until midday, is known as a *coup de main*. Finally, there is the *combite*, the Mirebalais form of the characteristic organization for mutual self-help known elsewhere in Haiti as the *Société Consgo*.[3]

Though strenuous physical labor is involved in the work of the *combite*, *for* the Haitian it symbolizes recreation and enjoyment — the stimulus of working with one's fellows, the pleasure of gossiping with friends, and the partaking of the feast which marks the climax of the day. All this makes the occasion one to be anticipated and enjoyed, and no one witnessing ten or fifteen men on horseback, each with a hoe over his shoulder, shouting and laughing as they clatter by at full gallop, can fail to sense their eager desire to arrive at their destination, a near-by *combite*.[4]

When a man or a woman needs help in preparing a field — for women, particularly those who sell in the market, may often become wealthy and large cultivators — a request is

1: [illegible] 8-4,8 (1856) 1857 SV3 [illegible] SV3
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made of key-men in the district informally called *chefs d'escouade*. They have the reputation of being those to whose call a number of men, perhaps a dozen, perhaps two or three times that many, will respond and come to give the aid that is desired. Such a person is given a "bouquet"—a bottle of *clairin*—which insures the appearance of himself and his group on the date set. A *combite* may be held at any time during the week except Sundays, which are dedicated to rest, and Tuesdays (in earlier times Mondays), when tradition holds a person must be free to work his own fields and care for tasks needed to be done at his own house. There is no requirement in either law or custom to respond to the call for communal work, and the larger landowners, who usually reside in the towns, rarely participate in a *combite*. So great is the pleasure derived from work of this sort, however, and so living is the realization among the peasantry of its potential benefits, that a man hesitates before he refuses to take part in a *combite* to which he has been summoned. Sometimes a man who has been faithful in his attendance at *combites* and has worked well at them falls ill during the time for planting or for clearing his ground of underbrush or for hoeing. In such case a *combite* is summoned, and even though this man is unable to offer the usual feast, his services are remembered and the men work with a will to insure the proper preparation of his ground.

The scene in a field where a large *combite* is at work is an arresting one. The men form a line, with a drummer in front of their hoes. The *simidor*, who leads the singing as he works with the others, adds the rhythm of his song to the regular beats of the drum, thus setting the time for the strokes of the implements wielded by the workers. This drum, slung about the neck of the drummer, is of the European form, never the hollowed-out African type that figures in religious rites. Its sound can carry far, however, and thus it not only beats the time for the hoes, but notifies all concerned that the *combite*

is under way. The size of the *combite* is judged by the number of drums and *lambi*, or conch-shell horns used, for where two or three of either are required, an especially large group of workers is usually assembled. It may be observed in passing that it is undoubtedly the sound of this *combite* drum, heard in the mountains or through the brush by travelers, that has so often been mistaken for the "mysterious booming" of the *vodun* drums.[6]

The preparation of the food is the work of the women of the household giving the *combite*, aided by their female relations and the wives of friends and neighbors. This is no small task, for goats and even a bullock may be killed to feed a large *combite*, while in addition other dishes to go with the meat must be cooked. Each woman is given charge of a great pot and does her best to see to it that an appetizing dish is ready for the men when their work is done. While the food is being cooked, the real object of the *combite*, the clearing of the field, is being pursued. A *chef d'esquade*, usually with a small group, begins the afternoon's labor, and, being a fast worker, he himself sets the pace. As more men arrive, he walks about, encouraging the constantly increasing number of men in their efforts, seeing to it that the tempo originally set is continued, and when necessary picking up a hoe to restore a lagging rhythm. Occasionally the *chef d'esquade* will stand in front of the men to make sure that all keep together, and if the lazy cannot be roused to work by direct order or through ridicule, he will drive them away.

The work progresses with incredible speed as the line moves down the field. In one case a *combite* of between fifty and seventy-five men completely cleared a field of several acres in a single afternoon, and this without undue effort or what appeared to be the expenditure of much energy. The flashing of the hoes in the brilliant sunlight accentuates the color of the scene; each implement is raised high above the head of the one who wields it, to be brought down at the proper in-

[illegible] 8-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 [illegible]
[illegible]

stant and in almost perfect accord with the hoes of all the other men in line. Pauses are frequent, and men often drop out of the line for a longer period of rest — even those not of the type laughingly called *majeurs*, who shirk their task and come to a *combite* principally to share in the feasting — and these, for the time being, join the singing with added verve. During the periods of rest, re-alignments are made and, if necessary, the direction of the line is changed; after a short time, however, the cry of the *simidor* rings out, the initial statement of a song is sounded, and as the chorus swings into the melody, the hoes rise again, the beat of the drum is begun, the plaintive notes of the *lambi* are heard, and the workers once more move down the field.*

Acting as the representative of the owner of the field to be cleared is a man who is called the *directeur*. If a large number of workers, a hundred or more, are assembled, he may divide them into two groups, assigning each half of the field, and then there is competition to see which group will first complete its allotted task. On such an occasion there would not only be more than one drum, but also more than one principal singer, or *simidor*, and the songs would thereupon have improvised words boasting of the prowess of the winning side, and ridiculing its opponents. The "director" also apportions the food, for it is customary to follow the rule which holds that since not all workers are equally eager or competent, so the rewards should not be the same for all. The shirkers are well known. They come but a little before sunset, or, arriving earlier, dawdle, walking about with their hoes and accomplishing but little during the afternoon. The lack of enthusiasm of these *majeurs* for work does not escape the "director," for though all who come to the *combite* must be fed, such men receive relatively little; while those who have worked the hardest not only are rewarded with dishes heaped with especially choice morsels of meat, but often find several sous when they reach the bottom of the dish.

Compère répond':	My friend replies:
"C'é' moin qui avec cousine moin."	"It is I who am with my cousin."
Assé-é!	Enough!
Moin en dedans déjà.	I am already inside.
En é-é-o!	Up, o!
Nan point taureau	No bull
Passé taureau.	Is better than [this] bull.
En é-o!	Up, o!

Finally, there may be cited a composition which complains against a shirker who comes and eats, but does little work:

Samba, é-é,	Samba, é-é,
Moin vé ou malhonnet',	I see that you are a dishonest man,
Tonnèrre!	*Tonnèrre!* *
Moin planté mais moin,	I plant my maize,
L'année rive,	The year rolls round,
Moin planté mangé,	I plant food,
Ou apé managé li.	You eat it.
En é-é-o!	In the air!
Moin planté zaboca,	I plant avocados,
Ça pou' ou mangé,	They are for you to eat,
Ou malhonnet-o.	You are a dishonest man-o.
Tonnèrre!	*Tonnèrre!*

241 The field cleared and hoed, the work of planting begins. This is carried on in accordance with a well-defined calendar of agriculture, which takes as its starting-point the beginning of the rains. Maize, which matures quickly, is the first crop, and is planted during the latter part of March or early in April, unless the rains are delayed, when it is planted later that month. Congo peas, which mature less rapidly, are put

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* *Tonnèrre*, "thunder," is a Haitian-French oath; the original is retained because in translation its force is lost.

L: Hamburger E-4,8 (1934) 1827 SV3 1681 SV3
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in at the same time, while calabashes and melon vines are planted where the ash of the fires that consumed the cleared brush can fertilize them. Rice, which grows somefour months before it matures, is planted between May and August in special patches reserved for this crop. Millet, planted in July, August, and September, can be harvested in January. Potatoes and manioc are put in the earth the latter quarter of the year and are harvested during the next dry season. Bananas, according to their species, are planted between April and September. Red beans, which mature twice a year and are cultivated high on the mountains surrounding the valleys, where it is cool, are planted in January and February and in August and September; they are harvested in June and January.

Sugar-cane is almost as important today as it was in the earliest days of Haitian agriculture. It is planted from May to July and gathered a year later, two fields being necessary if an annual crop is to be harvested. Once the cane is in the ground, however, it gives crop after crop without the need of preparing the fields or planting new shoots each year. Yams and *malangas* are cultivated on the mountainsides, the land often being worked by a system of share-cropping whereby a farmer who lives in the valley but owns mountain land employs a near-by peasant to work for him, providing him with the necessary supplies and entering into an agreement that the crop will be divided equally between them. This system, however, is said by the landowning Haitians to be unsatisfactory, since there is no way to verify the yield without spending an excessive amount of time. The Haitian farmer grows other produce: cabbage, squash, onions, garlic, peanuts, peppers, papaya, and spices, while the trees near the houses give coconuts, oranges, avocados, mangos, guavas, and other fruits.

Crops are not planted during the first quarter of the moon, the preferred time in Mirebalais being from eight days after the new moon until the full moon. It is held that anything

planted at other times will spoil. Similarly, millet and maize must not be harvested during those periods, or small insects will eat the grain. "No crop whose root is used for food may be planted during the forbidden phases of the moon," say the educated cultivators also, citing experiences of their own or of their neighbors who, being skeptical, planted their potatoes or other tubers during the wrong phase of the moon, only to have them completely spoil. In some instances not only the phases of the moon, but entire months are held unpropitious for planting. Thus July is regarded as a "weak" month for planting potatoes and plantains, while April, May, June, and August are preferred ones.

As in all Negro cultures, the Haitians dare not ignore the supernatural powers that rule the universe, where the question of getting a living is concerned. In the valley of Mirebalais, if the land where a field is to be made has a stream, a cock must be sacrificed to the spirit that resides in it, together with oil, peas, and some non-intoxicating drink. In making the offering, protection is asked against those who might steal from the field or injure it:

> "*Maître Source, moin mandé pou' ou gadé jardin moin vini fait ici. Cé pas pou' ou laissé méchant, malfaiteur contrarié tout ça moin mété nan terr'a. Si moin bien récoltè, moin va ba ou un pile mangé.* — Master of the Stream, I pray you to protect the garden I have just made here. Do not permit any evil designing person to harm all that I have put into the ground. If I harvest well, I will give you much food."

An invocation such as the following might also be pronounced on this occasion:

> "*Jesu Christ, les Saints, Marassa, les Morts: M'ap' travaillé; m'ap' planté graines-là. Pou' fai'l donné pou' moin, pou' m' join, pou' m' bai' Mystères, les Saintes, les Marassa, les Morts.* — Jesus Christ, Saints, Twins, the

Dead: I have worked; I have planted this seed. Make it yield for me, that I may make offerings to the Mysteries, the Saints, the Twins, the Dead."

At the entrance to the field the cranium of a horse, a mule, or a burro may be erected on a pole as magic against evil, and a wooden cross to which limes are attached may also be raised to protect against any expression of envy that might place a spell upon the growing plants. Finally, if there is any reason to believe that evil magic may have been invoked against the owner, a *hungan*, or voodoo priest is summoned to make a charm to ward it off, and, with a little ceremony, he interes this charm in the middle of the garden or at its entrance.

In addition to this, first fruits must be given as an offering to the supernatural forces whose goodwill has permitted a bountiful yield, particularly in the case of staple crops such as maize and rice. As the first heads of maize are brought in, they are roasted, and the kernels are cut from the cobs. The head of the household then throws them to the four cardinal points either in the garden or before his house, and as he does this, he pronounces an invocation such as the following:

" Jesu Christ, les Saints, les Marassa, les Morts: M' jet' mai' bai' ou, c'est pou' toujou' m' gagne bai' ou, et pou' m' gagne courai' pou' travai' a'c p'tit' moin, a'c femme moin, a'c parent' moin, a'c toute famille-a. Conserve m' pou' m' pas malade, pou' m' toujours join pou, m' bai' ou. — Jesus Christ, the Saints, the Twins, the Dead: I throw maize for you, that I may always have some to give, that I may gain courage [strength] to work, and also my children, my wife, my relations, and all my family. Care for me that I do not fall ill, so that I may always have [something] to give you."

After this ritual the new crop is available to its owner for whatever use he may care to make of it.

1: Herskovits E-4,5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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241 782 The first of the rice-harvest is pounded in a mortar. A chicken is killed, or, if the farmer is a man of some means, he may offer two chickens, which are stewed together with red beans. The rice, cooked separately, is put on one platter or in a calabash and the stew in another, and these are taken to the field, where they are cast to the four quarters of the earth. Some of this is also given to the spirit residing in any stream which may be on the property. In addition, sacred trees are rewarded for their care over the field with some of this food placed at the foot of each, but only after they have demonstrated their merit by a successful yield. A prayer of thanks, couched in terms such as these, is next pronounced:

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> *"Tout ça quitté. Aidé moin à travailler durant l'année, quitté ba moin force, courage. Moin bien content jodi-a, main ça moin porté ba-ou, c'e pou' ca toujou' bon. Ba moin force l'année pou' moin travaille plus l'année prochain. Merci.* — All this remains [here for you]. Help me to work during the year, give me strength and courage. Today I am well satisfied; here is what I bring you that all may always be well with me. Give me strength this year that I may work more next year. Thank you."

The family and their friends who may be present then return to the house and eat the remaining food.

241 782 262 It is also held dangerous to eat yams until the spirits are given the first of the new crop that comes to hand.[1] This is true even though a person may not himself be a farmer, but purchases his yams in the market. Unless this is done: *" Cap' malade, cap' tué même. Marassa kèmbé 'ou, morts, too, et mystères.* — You can become ill, you can even die. Twins will seize (molest) you; the dead, too, and the *mystères.*" The ceremony occurs during November or December, and in addition to the " Guinea " yams — for this ceremony is not performed for the great coarse yams — it is necessary to have imported dried salt fish, fish from Haitian waters which are dried

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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in Port-au-Prince, native or "créole" rice, red beans, and olive oil. The rice and beans are cooked separately, as are the yams and the two kinds of salt fish, each being seasoned with oil, salt, and pepper. The ordinary plates or calabashes on which food is offered the *loa*, or African deities, and the characteristic special double plates used in the twin cult, are prepared by rubbing them with olive oil. When the food is ready, it is placed in the proper containers in a closed room, and the family gather and say prayers of the Church — the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, and the Credo — after which the *loa*, the twins, and the dead are called to come and eat. From midday until after sunset the room remains unopened, so that these beings may partake of the offerings placed there for them. Finally, when darkness has fallen, the family enter, and the food, whose essence is believed to have been consumed by the spirits, is eaten.

At times when a garden yields but little, the owner may suspect that black magic is the cause. He thereupon tries to recall any of his neighbors who might have occasion to feel envious of him, or those with whom he may have quarreled. He does nothing overt at this time except to watch for signs of hostility on the part of the suspect, but when the time for the next planting arrives, he not only obtains a strong charm to protect his own garden, but if he is particularly exercised and thinks his suspicions are well justified, he may set a counter-charm in the field of his neighbor who he believes has harmed him. This would only be done in exceptional cases, where, for instance, the crops of one cultivator had failed when the fields about his had yielded well; for, in the main, garden magic is directed toward protective rather than toward malevolent ends.

A certain proportion of the harvest is reserved for use at home and the remainder is sold in the markets. Since these markets, which as the primary channel of distribution rank with farming in their importance in Haitian economy, they may next be considered.

1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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to cutting fruit, though seen in Africa, was probably introduced there by the early traders, and all machetes found today in Haiti are imported from Europe or America. The same is true of the hoe, for the short-handled, broad-bladed West African hoe has given way to the European long-handled type, though the blade of the Haitian hoe is somewhat broader than that used in America and Europe. Despite the presence of domesticated animals to draw the plow, this implement has never gained favor in Haiti, nor have recent efforts to teach the Haitian peasant the use of the plow achieved any degree of success. He prefers his African mode of cultivation, to say which implies more than just the employment of a certain implement, since even such matters as the manner in which he employs his hands and feet in the process of planting are included. When the Dahomean plants, for example, he holds a calabash of seed under his left arm, from which he takes the grains with his right hand. As he moves down the rows of newly turned earth, he makes a depression with the heel of his right foot, drops a few grains into this depression and, replacing the earth with his toes, takes a step so that he can repeat the process with his left foot. This is exactly the manner in which Haitians were observed planting in the valley of Mirebalais.[8] Unlike the usage in Africa, however—where the men clear the ground, the men and women plant, and the women tend the growing crops—the European pattern, which places agriculture in all its essential phases in the hands of men, has been taken over almost in its entirety.

The women have retained almost without change the African modes of preparing food. Grain is first pounded in an African-like mortar, with an aboriginal type of pestle, while the shelled kernels are winnowed in a large round basketry tray. The cooking is either done on a raised mud platform in the cooking shelter, as in West Africa, or on three stones, employed as rests for the pots, a method equally characteristic of Africa. In the Haitian cuisine the prevalence of stews, of

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P. vii]
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Preface

Every student of Haitian life is soon impressed by the richness of the materials spread out before him and the necessity of limiting his field of investigation. A study of Haitian religious practices, for example, draws one deeper and deeper into profusion, variation, and contradiction. One finds little difficulty in drawing a generalized picture with swift, bold lines; but when he descends into detail he discovers that the broad generalizations of the religious system contain within them many shifting and even warring motifs, and that what in one region is held to be true is not so regarded in another. The gods of *Vodoun* that are revered in one village are given only perfunctory treatment in another. Rites for the dead have a common denominator everywhere in the country, but each community brings to them something of its own or emphasizes traditions that elsewhere are forgotten. So it is also with music and dancing. A traditional drum rhythm may have one name in the north and another in the south, or a certain rhythm may be called by different names. There are diverse opinions about which dances are preferred by certain deities. The meaning of a song can be interpreted differently by different people. It is therefore no wonder that competent works on Haiti do not completely agree with one another in many respects, or that they seem, now and then, to be saying different or even contradictory things. Yet in many instances the seeming inconsistencies are in reality only minor variants within an overall scheme.

The purpose of this book is to present a broad view of certain aspects of Haitian culture and wherever possible to extract some of the flavor of Haitian thinking as well as its sense. It is easy to be fooled in regard to both. I remember seeing an old bearded man in the mountains beyond Furcy walking around his freshly hoed garden breaking a ripe tomato into small juicy bits which he scattered on the ground. It was about as primitive a method of planting as I had ever seen, and I wondered if even

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

one seed from that tomato would ever take root under the hot sun. Some time later, when I knew this man well, I talked to him about the care with which seeds must be planted if they are to grow properly. I told him how *we* grew *our* tomatoes. He listened carefully, nodding his head. When I had finished he said: "Yes, that must be a good way to do things in your country. But here in this valley God is good. He does not forget his children. From the broken tomato many plants will sprout. When God is good to you, you do not have to count the seeds." I suggested that perhaps one should not waste any of the precious seeds that God had provided; and to this he replied: "How is there waste? My garden is made to flourish by Zaka [the country man's special deity]. Some people give Zaka a feast every year, but between times they forget. Zaka helps me in my work, and I don't forget him. When I break the tomato and put it on the ground that way, it is a little taste for Zaka. Whatever I plant, I give him some. He is good to me, I am good to him."

What I learned from many incidents like this one was that the eye does not always see correctly. The old man was not just planting tomatoes, nor was he performing a conventionalized ritual act. It was a highly personalized act of faith in nature and confidence in the deity who shared his work.

A large part of this book deals with Vodoun, the religious practices based on West African traditions. One soon discovers that the songs and dances of Vodoun ritual are not merely music and motion supplementing and decorating more serious affairs. Virtually every aspect of Vodoun ritual is placative or invocational. The songs that are sung and the dances that are danced are direct supplication of various supernatural forces.

Undoubtedly, a number of principles which are put forward in this study do not apply equally to every region of Haiti; but they are, I think, true in general terms. Not until one has accepted the fact that different explanations exist for given phenomena, that the same rites are performed in different fashion in different places, and that the cult priests themselves do not agree on many details, may one begin to work toward a general view of the Haitian scene.

All of Haitian life is not Vodoun. And there are of course some Haitians who are relatively outside the central circle of its influence. But the inner meanings of Vodoun and its relationship to the total view of life permeate the entire scene. Music, too, binds together practically the entire fabric of Haitian existence. It is essential not only to the cult temple but to countless workaday activities. Agrarian work groups often perform their tasks to the accompaniment of a drum. And in the cult temple, the iron hoe of the fields often serves as a percussion instrument.

The Drum and the Hoe is the result of studies made over a period of

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[P.1]

1. The Making of the Haitian

If you come to Haiti by sea, a way that is old-fashioned but full of magic, you are first aware of the island as a range of hills rising out of the water, and then, as you sail closer, new ranges come into view behind the first, and eventually you see that everything is mountains. The ranges pile up in the distance and finally lose themselves in the white morning mists that the country people call "snow." A Haitian proverb says, "Behind the mountains are mountains," and that is a true picture of the island. 133

In the summer after the rains have come, the hills and mountain slopes are green; but later they turn brown, and it is then that one notices the deep gashes where the earth has eroded and washed away into the valleys below and into the sea. 134 132

From the top of the range called La Selle ("The Saddle"), when the heavy mists form and settle across the highland valleys one sees nothing but the great rounded sugar-loaf peaks, which appear as floating islands in a vast sea of white. 132 133

From a distant ship in the Caribbean in the full glare of daylight it is hard to imagine that millions of people have made a home of these mountains. But at night it is different. The mountains are alive then with twinkling spots of light made by cooking fires, torches, and electric bulbs. For the hillsides as well as the coastal lowlands are dotted with tiny huts and homesteads, and the trails from one village to another crisscross and lie on the land like a woven net. They lead from the high-up places down to the seacoast towns, through the waterless mesa of the frontier, through the pine forests of the southern range, through dense blankets of wild strawberries, wild-bamboo groves, and plantations of coffee. They find their way to the salt marches, the rice fields of the Artibonite Valley, and the cities. 361 361 487

In the lowlands the days are hot and tropical. It is there the sugar cane, bananas, and plantains grow so lushly. In the mountains the people have 132 [241]

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fires in their houses at night to keep out the damp cold that sweeps through the passes. And a man on the trail before dawn may wear a blanket over his head and carry a glowing ember with him for warmth.

On the south coast there are sometimes hurricanes and tidal waves, and many a small fishing boat and grass-covered house has been washed away in these storms. But the great mountains of the southern range deflect the winds, so that to the north their full fury is never known.

In the great Bay of Gonaïves the fishing boats sail out at night with the friendly winds that carry them to the fishing grounds of the island of La Gonave, and they return to the shore with their catches in the morning, or in the afternoon with the setting sun. The sailing boats from the tiny fishing village called Ville Matelot each day pass the deserted islet named Isle à Cabrit, where four Indian camps once stood. Today Isle à Cabrit is only a waterless, denuded place, a hunting ground for Carib and Arawak pottery and carved stone images.

In the frontier lakes of the Cul-de-Sac Plain there are wild ducks and alligators. Here the villagers fish with nets from rafts and dugout canoes. Now and then an iguana is seen, but there is little other game, because the edible wildlife of the country was long ago eaten by hungry people.

For the things that grow wild the Haitian is grateful—the avocado, the mango, the cashew, and the cotton which once planted produces again and again each year. He is grateful for the coconut palms, the calabash tree, the gourd vines, and the medicinal herbs that grow on every side. But the gifts of nature are not prolific. Most of the great stands of timber—lignum vitae, mahogany, dyewood and pine—have been cut away. Once fertile garden spots have dried up, and the soil that produces the yams, the pumpkins, the kaffir, and the rice is tired.

But the Haitian himself is not tired. He has suffered from malaria, yaws, and chronic hunger; yet out of the great old mountains of Haiti he has fashioned a way of life and a nation.

The Haitian of today was created out of the fabric of three continents—Africa, America, and Europe. He was shaped out of the plains and hills of Nigeria, Dahomey, and the Congo; the summers and winters of Europe; and the mountains and mountain mists of Haiti itself. He is the synthesis of the folk beliefs of the French and Spanish peasants, the Yoruba and the Arada of West Africa, and perhaps of the Carib Indians with whom he had close contact during his first days in the New World. He has brought into affinity the religious practices of Africa and the beliefs of the Church of Rome. He is outwardly simple and poor, but inwardly he is a complicated and rich man. He is rich in music, in the capacity for spiritual expression, in tradition, in folklore, and in memories. He has been able

2: Courlander 8-8 (1937-1958) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

[P.110]

9. *Land and Work*

There is a common Haitian saying which goes: "Pitit mangé, travaille youn pile" (A little food, but tremendous work). This is the way the Haitian peasant sees it. There is endless labor in the fields or in the perpetually eroding mountain gardens, on landholdings that are too small to give any promise of a better life. The rains that give life to the crops take away, year by year, the nourishment of the soil. Where forests or lush groves once grew on the hillsides, there are now deep, dry gullies. Where coffee plants, cotton, and yams once grew abundantly, there are now fields of stones. This is the heritage of the peasant farmer of today. Small holdings on the hillsides and in the valleys have become smaller through the years as the population has swelled and the land been subdivided. Three and a half million people must take their sustenance from that land. More than three hundred persons must share each square mile of soil. But most of Haiti is mountainous and formidable to agriculture. Two-thirds of the land area is untillable by modern standards. There is less than one acre of useful land per person. The best of the land in the alluvial valleys is held by large corporations producing sugar and sisal. Flat, arid stretches elsewhere are semi-desert.

In the small gardens the peasants grow maize, *ti mis* (millet), coffee, bananas and plantains, cotton, beans of various kinds, yams, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and manioc. In the delta areas they grow rice, and along the long coastline thousands of fishermen sail out in crude but sturdy boats to bring back fish fom the sea. Citrus trees, mango trees, and avocado trees grow wild; but they are fewer than in the old days. The Haitian works the soil and manages to subsist, but nature and history have not been kind to him.

Even less kind have been some of the chroniclers of the past, who have sought to disparage the Haitian as a lazy and careless creature who would

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3
[P.112-F]

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7. *A small coumbite, southern Haiti.*

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8. *Coumbite, southern Haiti. Vaniine players at the right; flag of the société at the left.*

2: Courlander B-5 (1907-1968) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

a massacre in the western part of the Dominican Republic which took the lives of an estimated five thousand to fifteen thousand Haitians. The survivors fled homeward, and many were settled in frontier areas by the government. Even so, today there are believed to be some sixty or seventy thousand Haitians still living east of the border. Large numbers of Haitians, particularly men, migrated to Cuba in the years following World War I, in search of better wages in the cane fields. By 1931 there were more than eighty thousand Haitians in that country.[6] But resentment by local Cuban labor and the onset of the depression combined to force the repatriation of great numbers of them. Thirty thousand Haitians came home from Cuba in the years 1936 and 1937 alone.

Solution of Haiti's problem of overpopulation does not seem imminent. The obvious answers would seem to be birth control, emigration, wiser use of natural resources, and industrialization. Since the country is predominantly Catholic, and since much social value is placed on children, birth control seems unlikely. And as health facilities become more widespread and infant mortality drops, the pressure will become more acute. Emigration seems to offer no hope, since neighboring islands and countries on the mainland give no encouragement. The Haitian may yet learn to conserve his land and to get more out of it, to stock his lakes with fish, and to bring more fish in from the sea. But this will not suffice. Nothing is left but industrialization, and that seems to be a thing of the far-distant future.

Nevertheless, the character of Haitian life remains essentially agrarian. The displaced peasant, whether he is now a hotel "houseboy," a taxi driver, or a cane cutter, dreams of returning to the land some day and growing bananas, coffee, and cotton that will make him independent. In far-off places such as Havana and New York, Haitians work and save money with the expectation that one day they will come home, buy fifteen or twenty acres of ground, build a new house, and live out their lives as decently prosperous *habitants*. The traditions of the agricultural society, along with Vodoun, continue to play a significant role in the life of the people.

One such tradition is the institution of the *coumbite*, a loosely knit coöperative work party of neighbors and friends. The word itself probably comes from the Spanish *convide*, or *convite*, meaning "to invite." A member of the group holds a coumbite by notifying his fellow members that on such-and-such a day his fields will require clearing or hoeing. There are several variants of the work gathering. One, called *carré* or *convée*, meets at irregular intervals and only on special invitation. There are no regular reciprocal obligations in the *convée;* the workers are

[6] [Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," Journal of Negro History, October, 1940, P. 515. Cf. P. 352, Category 116. --Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1954) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

compensated by a "feast" and party given at the end of the day by the host. More usual than the *corvée* is the regular sharing of work on one another's fields—the *raude*, or "taking turns."

An early morning work gathering is known as a *dourant jou'*. It meets early in the day, sometimes before dawn, continues until ten or eleven in the morning, when the sun becomes hot, and then disperses. An afternoon coumbite is called a *dine-machete* (dinner machete) and lasts from about two in the afternoon until early evening. When the work is finished, the men go to the house of the host, where they have dinner, much in the manner of the American threshing party. An all-day affair is called a grand coumbite.

Essential to all coumbites are musicians and singing leaders. The instruments used are various, according to local custom. In the south they are usually drums, *tymbales*, and bamboo trumpets. In some areas of the north, the *lambi*, or conch-shell trumpet, is favored.

According to the custom in the south, on the day of the coumbite the drummers arise in the false dawn before sunrise and begin a roundabout march to the home of the host. They pass before the huts of all the neighbors who are going to join the party, playing a *rappel* on the drums. By one's and two's the workers come down the trails to join the procession, bringing hoes, machetes, or sickles as required. As the marching group grows larger, there is talking, laughter, and perhaps singing. Most of the men who join the procession are from close by. Others who may have to travel from a distance, perhaps from the next valley, go directly to the house of the host. When the workers arrive there, the women of the house serve coffee. This is the usual breakfast of the Haitian peasant.

Then the drummers play another *rappel*, and the men go down to the field that is to be tilled. There may be ten, twenty, or fifty of them. Some coumbites are even larger. If the group is a small one, the men line up together. The singing leader, called a *samba* or *simidor*, begins a song, the drummers play, the hoes begin to rise and fall in unison, and the workers join in the singing. If the group is large it will divide into two or three squads, each trying to outdo the other. The men stand shoulder to shoulder, moving the hoes up and down together, syncopating their movements by pauses as they sing their responsive parts. Sometimes tafia or rum is portioned out. The squads move forward slowly, inching their way across the field. The samba beats on his hoe blade with a stone to keep time for his song. His job is to "encourage" the men. He may sing old familiar songs or compose new ones, songs with humor and bite in them, ribald songs, and songs of ridicule. They may criticize

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1954) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

476 241 533 461 men who have failed to join the coumbite, or praise the host, or single out various individuals for comment. The songs of the coumbite are a newspaper of the affairs of the people. The news is personalized, editorialized, and replete with comic vignettes.[A]

476 241 461 594 At noon the drummers signal a halt, and the workers shoulder their hoes, wipe off their machetes, and adjourn to the house for food. If it is a grand coumbite, the men rest for several hours, talking, catching up on sleep, or playing cards or *mayomba*. About three o'clock they go back to the fields to work until evening. Then comes the feast, under the canopy adjoining the house. The host and his wife have killed and cooked one or more goats, depending on the size of the group. The men are served meat, rice, beans, and whatever else has been prepared. [273] Afterward, women join the party, and there is more tafia or rum. Some of the men then drift homeward, but most stay on for dancing. Zesse, Congo, or Juba drums are brought out, and the festivities begin. If another coumbite is not scheduled for the next day, the music and dancing may last well into the night.

476 562 Women, too, have coumbites to perform various kinds of large tasks, from field work to winnowing and coffee sorting, though in general the women's work groups lack the festive character of the men's gatherings.

476 241 595 There is a more tightly knit form of coumbite, known as a *société*. In southern Haiti there are the société Congo and the société Martinique; in northern Haiti there is the société Ciyé. These sociétés are clubs built around mutual work needs and recreational activities. The société Congo that appears in the town or city streets during Rara days, with bamboo or conch-shell trumpets, drums, flags, and masks, is usually composed of the men who have joined forces to till the fields. In some instances, it may also conform roughly to membership in a particular hounfor, or cult center. Unlike the ordinary coumbite, the société is not a group which meets only at ground-breaking or harvesting time; it is a permanent organization with regular, sometimes day-to-day, obligations. Week after week it moves from one man's land to another, doing the tasks that have to be done. There is no question of "Can you come?" The group goes first to one man's land, then to another's until all the work has been done. If a member of the société falls sick, so that he cannot work his own field, the société takes over his tasks for him.

476 Coumbites are held not only for agricultural work but for house-building, and sometimes for the building of a hounfor.

[171] The Haitian coöperative work group has much in common with European and American husking and barn-building parties; but it has

[A] [For footnote see Category 116, P. 352. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-S (1937-1968) 1968 SV3 Hait SV3

rhythmically, to the accompaniment of drums, *catas*, or horns, while a singing leader composes topical songs in which the laborers join.

The tools which a rural Haitian chooses, and the way he uses them, often are in a West African tradition. He performs a multitude of tasks with his machete, or bush knife: weeding a garden, peeling an orange, cutting down a tree, making a drum or mortar, opening a coconut. It is an all-purpose tool, as it is in Africa. Until a few years ago it was supplemented by the extra-long, heavier, "double machete." The axe and the chisel are known and used too, but the machete is supreme. The hoe is the tool for tilling the soil, even in the flat country, and even though the Haitian has horses and cattle which could pull a plow. Horses are for riding and not for pulling. In carrying loads, the Haitian peasant still prefers the head to the shoulders. If he has a donkey, the donkey will carry for him. An old Haitian proverb goes: "Meçi Bondieu pou' bourrique là, si nous pas gainyain bourrique là faut Haitien po'té tout bagaille" (Thank God for the donkey, if we didn't have the donkey the Haitian would have to carry everything)." Generally speaking, the rough and rocky terrain of Haiti and inadequate secondary roads have done nothing to encourage the use of carts or wagons.

Corn is stored in the trees, as in West Africa, or in granaries built upon stilts, also as in West Africa. The Haitian makes his fire in the African fashion, with several long sticks or poles meeting point-to-point in the heart of the fire. As the ends are consumed, the sticks are pushed toward the center. Grain is pulverized in large wooden mortars, as in West Africa, and winnowed in a woven tray. Fish traps are sometimes woven in the traditional West African manner, and fishermen often set their nets in converging spirals and beat the water with sticks to drive the fish to the center. And on the rivers and lakes are to be seen dugout canoes of a kind familiar on the inland waters of West Africa.

The folklore of the fields contains many themes known to the West African. One old Haitian farmer, discussing the spiritual relationship of the planter to the earth, declared that a man must be strong and potent when he plants, else the crops will be vitiated and sickly. For this reason, he said, a man must not plant seeds the day after he has had sexual intercourse, because he has been temporarily drained of his life-giving powers.[9A]

The tale of the hoe that worked by itself in the fields is also widespread. It enters many animal and Bouki stories, and also is known in a form that is familiar in West Africa. In this story, there was once a man who owned a hoe which worked by itself whenever a magical formula was pronounced. It would stop working whenever the magical

9A [For footnote, see Category 116, P. 352.-- Analyst]

[The Vodoun pantheon]

the earth like the carrying pad that women wear to support bundles on their heads. Wherever Ayida Wèdo shifted his position there were earthquakes.[1] When the rainbow appeared after a rain it was said that Ayida had come out from under the earth to drink of the fresh water.

Damballa Grand Chemin (Damballa of the Highway). Another manifestation of Damballa as a protector of those on long journeys.

Damballa Verre. Another manifestation of Damballa.

Dangue Wedo. Considered to be the daughter of Damballa. The ending of her name (-ci) suggests that at one time she may have been considered a wife rather than a daughter.

Dosu Wedo. A member of Damballa's family.

Anlo Wedo. A member of Damballa's family. Said to be a "work loa" who aids men with their gardens, especially in time of illness.

Erzulie Dobu, or Dogba, sometimes spelled Ezzulie. One of the "big" loa of the Dahomé pantheon, a symbol of purity, and sometimes identified with the Virgin Mary. Her color is white, and services to her include a ritual sweeping and sprinkling of the earth and a perfuming of the air. Food offerings to her include corn meal and eggs. Male "horses" of Erzilie are sometimes bound to her by mystic marriages, and they are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days which belong to her. There are a number of Erzilies, regarded as members of the same family or, in some cult centers, as different manifestations of the same deity. Some Haitians regard Erzilie Dobu as the ancestor of the Erzilie family and refer to her as Grand Erzilie. Note that there is a Dahomean town named Dogba at approximately 0° 6' E., 6° 50' N.

Erzilie Freda, or Erzilie Dahomain (Dahomé), or Erzilie Freda Dahomain. Like Erzilie Dobu, she is a symbol of purity and is identified with the Virgin Mary. Mystic marriages are performed with her, and her "horses" are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days. She is also a giver of wealth.

Erzilie Wedo. A sister or daughter of Erzilie Dobu and also related to Damballa.

Erzilie Manzo. A sister of Erzilie Freda.

Erzilie Ranga. A manifestation of Erzilie who is especially fond of the Ranga dance.

Erzilie Jfaouve (Red Eyes). A stern and hard Erzilie who is often identified with Petro rather than Dahomé rites.

Aizan Freda. A member of the Erzilie escorte, regarded as a market-place protector. In Dahomey, Aizan was a protector of all public gathering places.[2]

Aizan Balindjo

Aizan Dlaau Bolo Bosu

Maîtresse Maîtresse. A special form of Erzilie as priestess.

Maîtresse Espagnole, or Espagnole. A person mounted by this Erzilie talks only Spanish.

Sobo, or Sogbo. A thunder deity who hurls stones to the earth when angered. Some of the stones thrown by Sobo are regarded as the sacred residence of various loa. Sobo (or Sogbo) is a member of the original Thunder pantheon of Dahomey.

Sobo Badé, or Sogbo Badé, or simply Badé. A close relative of Sobo, regarded as the protector of the hounfor (*badé*). In Dahomey, Badé is sometimes referred to as the son of the deity Sobo.[3]

[1] [See Ellis, The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, pp. 47-49; and Herskovits, Dahomey, II, 245ff. Cf. P. 354 Category 116. --Analyst]

[2] [Ellis, op. cit., p. 52. Cf. P. 354, Category 116. --Analyst]

[3] [Herskovits, op. cit., pp. 162ff. Cf. P. 354, Cat. 116. --Analyst]

2: Courlander 3 B-4 (1937-1965) 1969 SVD Haiti SV2

relations between the husband and the wife's family, it is nevertheless commonplace for men who can afford it to have more than one wife.

[2]Simpson, in "Sexual and Familial Institutions in Northern Haiti," *American Anthropologist*, October-December, 1942, p. 656, observes that in northern Haiti there are three distinct types of placage. "A *femme-caille* shares her mate's house, while a *maman pitite* is a woman who has born children for a man without living in his house. A *femme placée* does not live in her consort's house, and she has given him no children." Although none of these women has any legal rights of inheritance, Simpson notes, "moral claims to a man's property stand in descending order for these three classes of placées."

[3]Johnston, *The Negro in the New World*.

[4]UNESCO, *The Haiti Pilot Project*, p. 18.

[5]Simpson, "Haitian Peasant Economy," *Journal of Negro History*, October, 1940, p. 515.

[6]The group work patterns of Haiti show a common ancestry with Negro gang work patterns in the United States. While nothing so formalized as the coumbite persists among American Negroes, similarities are striking. The emphasis on rhythm, the swinging of hammers or picks in unison, the need for a singing leader, the responsive chorus, and the frequent use of some kind of percussion to keep time, all derive from a common concept of the nature of group work.

[7]Herskovits, "Some Aspects of Dahomean Ethnology," *Africa*, Vol. V (July, 1932), pp. 266-276.

[8]Cardinall, *Tales Told in Togoland* (p. 109), observes that among the Krachi people of Togoland "no man may have sexual intercourse with a woman for seven days before he goes hunting."

[9]An Ashanti story told by Rattray in *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* credits the hedgehog with owning the original hoe; according to this version, the hoe escaped across the sea to the country of the white men, who then possessed the secret. Afterward, the white man brought many hoes to Ashanti.

Chapter 11: *Dancing and Dance Drama* (*pp. 126-136*)

[1]Quoted in Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 73.

[2]Actually a banjo-like instrument of African provenience. The similarity of the word *Asezè* to *Aanjo* appears to be more than a coincidence.

[3]Saint-Méry, *De la danse*, as translated by Lillian Moore in "Moreau de Saint-Méry and 'Danse,'" *Dance Index*, October, 1946, p. 238.

[4]Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

[5]Brandy or rum with gunpowder is sometimes drunk by persons possessed by the loa Ogoun, deity of war.

[6]Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

[7]United Nations photograph no. 62265.

[8]Students of United States Negro life will recognize the word *counjaille* as a variant of *counjaw*, a dance known on the lower Mississippi. According to one observer, Dr. Willis James of Spelman College, Atlanta, small Negro boys on the docks used to call to the boat passengers:

> "Throw me a nickel
> Throw me a dime
> If you want to see me
> Do the counjaw."

The term *counjaw* is still used to mean hand-loading of cotton bales on river boats. When this loading was done mainly by hand some years ago, the stevedores worked rhythmically in a line and sang. An old man from Louisiana testified that within his own memory the dockside *counjaw* was accompanied by makeshift drums and other percussion.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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the past, even while the new setting and changing conditions led to the development of certain innovations in society and culture. In a few Caribbean societies, Haiti included, freedom brought with it the opportunity to create a yeomanry—an independent, landholding class of agriculturists who produced most of their own consumption needs and also produced commodities for sale. These were "reconstituted yeomen," whose ways of life combined elements from the African and American Indian past, as well as considerable European and Asian influences, in new cultural constellations.

Haitian country folk are a particularly good example of such a historical process. The crops Haitian yeomen cultivate include the maize, sweet potatoes, and manioc of the indigenous American Indian (Taino) people, and other cultigens such as papaya and avocado which had been domesticated in mainland aboriginal America; and items like taro and mangoes from Oceania, sesame and sugarcane which originated in the Middle East and India, and vegetables from Europe. Their domestic animals, including cattle, swine, and fowls, are nearly all from the Old World. The chief agricultural tools—hoe, billhook, and dibble, which are well adapted to Haiti's shallow topsoil and hilly terrain—may be European or African in origin; the practice of burning off weeds before planting may be African or American Indian. In the case of each trait—crop, tool, practice—one is confronted by the diverse and entangled culture history of the Haitian people. What is true of agriculture is true of all else. The religion of Haiti is at once two religions rather than one: Catholicism *and* vodoun. Yet these two belief systems form a single ideology for most Haitians, particularly in the rural areas and among those of the urban lower classes. The Creole language is similarly complex in origin. While its lexicon is predominantly derived from French, parts of its syntax are not of Romance origin. For instance, the use of postpositive nominalizing particles and the absence of gender typify Haitian Creole, and are decidedly not Romance in character. Terminology shows much the same; for example, animal names and anatomical terms are mainly French in origin, but some cooked foods carry names of African provenience.

The "mixing" of various elements of culture from different traditions is, of course, neither uniquely Caribbean nor uniquely Haitian. All cultures are growths out of the past, and change by losing and gaining traits and by combining and recombining their substance in

3: Leyburn Z-4,5 (no date) 1966
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311 bean country, and perhaps fewer than in any country in Latin Amer-
423ica. The agriculture itself, with the exceptions now of those very few
171 large-scale plantations in sisal and sugarcane, is adapted to small plots and is worked with intensive labor and few tools on hilly land. Com-
433pared with agricultural production, especially of cash crops, in most
178 mainland Latin American countries, productivity is low. The yeomanry is conservative in its agricultural practices, and not ready to change unless the changes entail minimal risk and the gains to be real-
241 ized are clearly demonstrable (Erasmus, 1952:20–26). Yeomen culti-
177 vate with three goals in mind: cash income from world-market
185 commodities (for instance, coffee, sisal, vetiver); cash income from
434 items produced for local sale and consumption; and subsistence. While they are heavily involved in production for sale, their crop choices and land-use patterns rest fundamentally on a subsistence orientation. All grow a substantial part of their own food, especially sorghum, maize, sweet potatoes, taro, manioc, malanga (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium* Schott), plantains and bananas, fruits and vegetables, and
423rice where possible. The land is invested with considerable affect:
823 gods live in it; it is the ultimate security against privation; family
471 members are buried in it; food and wealth come from it; and it is good in itself, even if not cultivated. While such attitudes are common in yeoman societies, Haiti's history of slavery, and of access to land through revolution, has given a special symbolic significance to landowning. Land is valued above all else and is sometimes held "uneconomically"—that is, even when the capital and labor power to work it are lacking.

114 Leyburn describes better than any other writer the history of land
175 acquisition by the yeoman after 1804. The French plantations lay in
423 ruins, never to recover, while early authoritarian attempts to restore the prerevolutionary economy under native Haitian leadership soon failed. In the course of a century, the Haitian people laid claim to their own soil, while population growth and the adoption of the French tradition of equal inheritance progressively reduced the average size of holdings. In spite of some plantation development after the United States occupation, most agricultural land in Haiti is still employed in small holdings, and "land reform" in the conventional sense—the breaking-up of large estates and the creation of a class of small landholders—is nearly irrelevant to Haiti's needs.

462 As today's yeomanry cultivates, so its womenfolk market. Nearly
443

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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three hundred marketplaces serve the towns and countryside, some of them patronized by thousands of buyers and sellers on market days. By participating in active small-scale trade, the wives of the yeomen contribute in a limited way to national economic efficiency and growth. As in all heavily agrarian economies marked by poor storage facilities, inferior transportation, and low consumer incomes there is considerable substitution of labor for capital, and there are high losses through spoilage. Except for the marketing of export commodities, much time is consumed in bargaining, in carrying, and in hand-processing of various sorts. But these activities are the accompaniments of the general low level of development of the Haitian economy, not one of its causes.

The economic challenges posed by agriculture on the one hand, and by marketing on the other, differ significantly. Since these activities are carried out predominantly along the lines of a sexual division of labor, the Haitian countrymen and their marketing wives differ in some regards in their attitudes. Foreign observers of the nineteenth century commented regularly on the industry and energy of Haitian rural women, stressing their predominance in trade. Some writers have attributed this convention to the West African tradition, since women are the marketers, men the farmers, in many African societies. Leyburn, however, notes that the militarism and political unrest that have marked Haiti during so much of its history were serious impediments to peaceful trade. Women came to predominate in marketing, he theorizes, because men did what they could to avoid the towns, since they were often impressed into roving army bands if they traveled far from home. Whatever the historical causes may be, it has been established that the women of Haiti's countryside carry on most of the internal trade, while their husbands do most of the farming. These women, on the whole, know more about the towns, mix more easily with outsiders, and show more intrepidity in trade than the men show in agriculture. Yet it has been demonstrated that, for most of them, the scale of their enterprise is so modest and the economic opportunities open to them so restricted that their energy and daring can do little to increase the level of productive activity (Mintz, 1964:256–86).

Haiti's lack of large factories, mechanized production, and a skilled industrial labor force means that the country is unindustrialized by any usual measure.

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The major effect of the North

American tenure seems to have been to make possible a much more telling centralism in political control than had been operative in Haiti at any time since the fall of the Christophe regime; and the consequences of this change are still being felt.

Small-scale rural cultivators are famous for their tendency to confine their consumption to culturally conventionalized levels—that is, to live as their predecessors lived before them. Though they are involved in commercial spheres larger than the communities in which they live, they seek to limit that involvement and to maintain their cash expenditures at a low level. It is in this sense that Haiti might be called a "quasi-capitalistic" society. To put it another way, yeomen of this sort do not seek to change or to expand their production—rather, they aim to conserve a way of life set by tradition. The ideology of resistance to social and cultural change is one of the major obstacles to development; but it would be rash to damn such an ideology without reflection. In Haiti, for instance, there has long been pressure upon the rural masses to expand their production of coffee, the major export crop. However, this pressure has not been accompanied by any serious grass-roots attempt to improve coffee production or to offer genuine incentives to the cultivators. The yeomanry has no assurance at all that any expansion of effort will lead to gains *for them*; and they are little prepared to invest such effort merely because they are told that it will be good for Haiti. In fact, it is likely that the production of subsistence crops has expanded in recent years at the cost of coffee production, for the yeoman knows that he can at least be sure of eating and of selling locally such crops as maize, sorghum, and yams, regardless of what may happen in Port-au-Prince or to the world coffee market. This view, combined with the yeoman's painfully acquired distrust of those who prate at length concerning his welfare, has meant a virtual stagnation of agricultural export production, even though the whole land quite literally depends on this production in order to progress.

The effect of this rural resistance is to create an apparent very sharp difference in goals between countryman and bureaucrat. It is perfectly understandable that the countryman should fail to see the connection between heightened coffee production and a higher level of public welfare and social services. His experiences hardly persuade him that it is his surplus-producing capacity that underlies the kind and quality of public institutions with which the state provides him.

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241 565 185 433 Nor does his effort in producing more and better cash crops translate itself directly into higher consumption, since he has no say in setting the price for his coffee. Under the circumstances, it is naïve to suppose that "education" alone can make the yeoman's role in economic or political development a more active one. The disposition to maintain a habitual level of consumption, rather than to believe that an increase in productivity will result in expanding services or improved consumption, is difficult to change; and the quasi-capitalistic quality of Haitian agricultural production is merely one way of saying as much. Economic change, in this sense, has to depend partly on changes in attitudes toward production. Until an agricultural extension service worthy of the name is able to make a massive attack on the shortcomings of yeoman cultivation in Haiti, this conservatism will perpetuate itself. And agricultural extension will not be able to wage this battle for change—even when its services become adequate in quality and quantity—unless the promises of greater economic rewards or of improved social services for the rural masses are occasionally honored.

47 433 565 178 The term "quasi-capitalistic" has much less force, of course, when applied to urban enterprise. But there, too, economic activity has a curiously static quality when compared to enterprise in more developed countries. The Port-au-Prince capitalist is famous for "playing it safe." Import-export trade, tourist hotels, guided tours, gas stations, and urban slum real estate are more rewarding spheres of investment than shops or commercial farms. A small but economically important Syrian-Lebanese-Italian group limits its local investment accordingly, as do most of those "native" Haitians who carry on their businesses in the towns and cities. Elite families consist largely of siblings who interlock their economic activities with government, the military, agricultural processing and exporting, consumer-goods importing, tourist-connected services, and the professions. A slum block, a post in the ministry of tourism, a customs agency, or a tour agency, can be a lucrative investment; few indeed are the Haitians prepared to take the risks needed to develop highly productive farms, to produce improved strains of poultry, or to introduce industrial skills through a modern machine shop. And the reasons for this lack of verve and daring are easy to find. Governmental instability, excessive taxation, lack of access to markets, and the absence of roads, communication, small-scale credit facilities, and the like mean that special

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work until noon. A two-hour siesta followed, but from two until sunset there was steady work. Only after evening prayers was the worker free. During the day no cultivator might leave his task except for direst need. The lame and the halt were not required to till the fields, but must carry around buckets of drinking water, take care of the children, and do odd jobs about the estate.

Christophe made a steady and, in the main, successful effort to explain to the people the necessity of hard work on the plantation. As with the noblemen, the serfs knew precisely what was expected of them, and why. Their regimentation was strict, but understandable. It was clearly stipulated that if a worker shirked his job he was to be put in prison and made to do forced labor there. Laziness in the fields was to be punished by strokes from the overseer's liane. Hard and steady work was demanded during the whole thirteen years of Christophe's rule, but only rarely was there complaint, as there had been constantly under Dessalines, of cruelty on the part of overseers.

The quarter part of the total crop of any plantation was to go to the workers as wages, and, since production increased and prices rose, this quarter which they were free to spend as they pleased provided a powerful incentive to further industry. As compared with anything they had known before, the workers were now recipients of an ample income. On the plantations they cultivated the money crops of sugar and coffee. In addition, each family had its own garden plot on which to raise the food crops—yams, plantains, beans, and bananas—for personal use.[9]

Christophe was so far ahead of his time that he tried to introduce British methods of agriculture into his kingdom. The results were insignificant. The plough, although obviously superior in efficiency to the hoe, eliminated the sociable companionship of working in unison, and demanded horses and mules which the country lacked. The innovations were consequently too radical to be accepted. In the main, the agricultural methods of the kingdom continued to be those familiar in slave days.

Thirteen years of careful direction can fix many patterns of social routine. One of Christophe's rules was that no cultivator attached to

9. The staples of other countries, such as Irish potatoes, wheat, barley, and corn, did not flourish in Haiti. On the large plantations, indigo and cotton, which had been money crops in the French régime, were generally neglected, as they had been in the time of Dessalines.

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686 175 675 692 their districts, principally during the working hours of the day. They were held responsible for all consequences of their own negligence.

175 671 466 This whole flow of legislation was designed primarily for the protection of the great landed proprietors, yet there were other laws which aided the masses. In former days workers had been coerced through corporal punishment. This was by law now abolished. Temporary assignments of garden plots were required for each family of laborers; medical care must be provided at the expense of the planter; the aged and infirm must be guaranteed the right to keep their homes and gardens even though no longer able to work. Expectant mothers in the fourth month of pregnancy must be relieved of field work, with no limitation of their right to share in the estate's income; mothers of nursing children must be permitted to remain at home until the weaning of their infants.

175 647 241 A great concession to the workers was made by abolishing the office of "inspector of cultures." In the days of Toussaint and Dessalines each district of the country had had its inspector, whose duty it was to see that crop cultivation proceeded according to schedule.[27] This man's disapproval of conditions resulted in fines and personal chastisement. By abolishing the office Pétion effected a great saving in salaries, for there had been thousands of these inspectors; on the other hand, the watchfulness of the inspectors had kept agricultural production at a high level. With no officials to dog the footsteps of the workers, crops immediately fell off.

175 466 24 656 Pétion clearly expected la grande culture to be the prevailing mode of agriculture in the republic. He fostered all kinds of legislation regulating it, even aside from that already mentioned. For example, a complete schedule was prepared for the division of income of the estate.[28] But the entire system was too neatly worked out and artificial to be effective, particularly since it was not backed up with force. The threat of punishment removed, most workers began gradually, often deliberately, to sabotage the system. It was much more pleasant

27. Christophe followed his predecessors in keeping the district inspectors.

[466] [465] 28. This could be very complicated. A tenant farmer might hire workers, and so have to share his half of the income with them. In such cases, the division of the money crops was to be made in kind or in money, at current prices, in the presence of the local justice, his assessors, and an officer of the *gendarmerie*. The workers' "fourth" was divided into portions of which three went to the first foreman, two to each of the skilled workers, one and a half to each male or female worker, and one half to each child laborer between ten and fourteen years of age.

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against almost unanimous public opinion opposing enforcement. In 1828 it was reported that dancing, which the Code had strictly limited to week ends, was a nightly diversion near the capital. One of the principal dancing resorts was the house of a captain of rural police, the very man who was supposed to repress such amusements.[45]

Boyer had done his best, and his best was merely a good piece of office work. When his Code failed to operate, he could think of nothing further to suggest for the economic rehabilitation of Haiti. The last fifteen years of his administration witnessed a gradual lapse into that small-scale farming which was to be characteristic of Haiti for the remainder of the nineteenth century. By comparison with former standards, production and steady industry had both fallen off since Boyer came to the presidency. The testimony of visiting foreigners is unanimous on the decline of industry.

The British consul, Mackenzie, said in 1827 that there was very little field labor then being done, and that only elderly people, principally aged "Guinea Negroes" long accustomed to steady work, carried on the tradition. No measures of the government could induce young people born in Haiti to labor or to change from their "habitual vagrancy."[46] Another Englishman, James Franklin, remarked in 1828 that land values throughout the republic had greatly declined because no one could make a profit within any moderate time. Labor was high, he writes, for ordinary wages did not attract the workers who preferred idleness. (This word is certainly unfair: it was work at their own bidding which they preferred, not idleness.) Government lands lay untilled, no one evincing the slightest desire to purchase or utilize them. Franklin continues:

> Land also in the possession of individuals is similarly circumstanced; and those who are large proprietors cannot effect a sale of any produce which they may have beyond the quantity which they can consume; consequently a proprietor may have an immense extent of land, and yet be quite unable to derive any benefit from it by cultivation, or to convert it into money, for the want of purchasers. Thus . . . there is no individual wealth in the country, because, although a man may have very large landed possessions, still those possessions are unavailable, for they produce him nothing, as he can seldom find persons disposed either to occupy or purchase them.

45. Although dancing is spoken of here as an amusement, it is highly probable that at least a part of it had connection with the Vodun religion.

46. Charles Mackenzie, *Notes on Hayti* (London, 1830), I, 100. Mackenzie is clearly exaggerating, unless by "field labor" he means work on plantations, in contrast to farming on small plots.

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he could save or borrow the money, buy a small patch and become a freeholder in his own right. And in the mountains, if one were willing to endure isolation, one could get much land by squatter's claim.

A vivid indication of the declining economic condition of the country will be found in the actual scale of real-estate prices. In the eighteen-twenties the finest land in the republic did not sell for more than $60 an acre, even when contiguous to a port for shipping or extremely fertile. Such a price would have been ridiculous in the days of the French colony. Farms in the plains and mountains, suitable for cocoa and cotton, could be had in Boyer's time for $20 or $30 an acre in any quantity from ten to five hundred acres. In the rich Artibonite Valley small plots for horticultural purposes sold for $40 an acre; indigo and cotton land rarely brought over $30; and a complete cotton plantation which had borne richly in colonial days sold for from $12 to $20 an acre. In the North, despite its fertility and more careful cultivation under Christophe, land seldom brought more than $40 or $45, while pasture lands could scarcely find purchasers at $40. A lot in Port-au-Prince with a frontage of sixty feet and a depth of fifty, well situated for trading purposes, brought only $200.[50] Fifteen years later even these prices were fantastically high, for by then no one was wealthy enough to purchase an estate.

5. *Lapse into Peasantry (1827–1843)*

"Peasant" is one of those words whose meaning everyone knows yet whose definition is never precise. It clearly carries the connotation of farming the land by conservative, generally uneducated, persons whose families have for generations lived on the same plot of earth without any great ambition to move away or change their economic lot. It means small ownership. And most particularly it means a comparatively low social status, for we think of peasantry as existing only in those countries which have a clear-cut social class system, with a stratification which would make it difficult for a person to move from one class to another. His land is to the peasant both home and living; his household is dependent almost solely upon the product of its own labor. He is generally conceived to be too complacent, if not too ignorant or too dull, to take advantage of commercial opportunities which might bring him wealth. "It is increasingly

50. These figures for 1824–28 are from Franklin, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

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recognized that the really important characteristics peculiar to the peasant are his sentiments and attitudes, the intense attachment to his native soil and family tradition, which, even in the economic sphere, take precedence over the desire for individual advancement and gain."[51]

Haiti in 1804 was still a country of large estates, and Dessalines and Christophe strove to keep it so. Under the active generosity of Pétion and the passive indifference of Boyer after his Code Rural had failed, few great plantations were left intact. The recorded donations of these two presidents to their generals, civil functionaries, and lesser officers, are as follows:[52]

134 grants of 150 carreaux (about 450 acres).			Total: 59,300 acres.
176	35	105	18,480
639	30	90	57,510
711	25	75	54,325
2,322	20	60	139,320
8,000	5	15	120,000
			Grand total: 448,935 acres.

Haiti followed French law rather than British, so that the rule of primogeniture did not prevail. It requires only a moment's reflection to see that even within a single generation the thousands of small properties noted in the table would be subdivided many times, since a father apportioned his land to all his sons. By 1842 it is probable that not a single plantation of the size common in colonial times was still intact.[53] On the testimony of numerous government officials and commandants of arrondissements, it was estimated in that year that 46,610 small landed properties were under fair cultivation.[54] If the population at that time be estimated at 800,000, seven eighths of whom were engaged in agriculture, there would accordingly be about fifteen people (including children) to each rural property. But A large number of small estates are left out of this account, which are said to be *badly* cultivated, or neglected. Taking the number of each separate

51. C. von Dietze, "Peasantry," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, XII, 50.
52. This table is compiled from figures cited in Armand Thoby, *La Question agraire en Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, 1888), *passim*, and Dr. F. Dalencour, *Le Sauvetage national par le retour à la terre* (Port-au-Prince, 1923), p. 18.
53. See Raymond Renaud, *Le Régime foncier en Haïti* (Paris, 1934), pp. 42–45.
54. Candler, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

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family on an average, at 5 persons, husband, wife, and three children, we arrive at the conclusion, that the head of every third family in the state is engaged in cultivating his own freehold; a proportion of independent proprietors, such as perhaps scarcely any other country in the world can exhibit. The number of acres cultivated by these small proprietors, varies from 9 to 30; many of them keep horses, cows, and goats: they raise sufficient provisions of the bread kind, such as yams, plantains, and bananas, for the main support of their families; they kill hogs for meat, and they dispose of their coffee, cotton, hemp, castor oil, and fruit, at the public market for money, to purchase clothing, furniture, and other necessaries. The houses they live in, though poorly furnished, are decent habitations; and many of them have gardens attached, neatly fenced in with bamboo, or with logwood, or aloe hedges.[55]

If these figures are even approximately accurate, the majority of the people of Haiti had not yet become peasants in the sense of being landowners, for in the statement cited only a third of the people owned their land. Another large group, however, possibly a third of the population, were squatters, living on land which technically belonged to someone else but from which they were never ejected. The remaining third, excluding the town and village dwellers, were in the intermediate stage between hirelings and peasants. Some worked for a given rate of wages, but the larger number worked for shares of the produce on the land of large proprietors.

The crop-sharing system (Americans of the twentieth century call it share-cropping) of the 'thirties and 'forties was an automatic but temporary adjustment worked out in perfect disregard of the Code Rural. In general, two arrangements prevailed. By one the laborers worked in return for half the total produce of the estate, raising food for themselves in gardens provided by the owner; under the other they worked for a quarter of the produce, the proprietor guaranteeing to keep them in provisions. There was no general concurrence in Haiti at the time as to which plan was the more economical to the laborer and his family. Certainly both schemes were prejudicial to large crops of coffee and sugar, and therefore to the economic prosperity of the proprietors and the state; since this was so, the crop-sharing expedient was short-lived. Workers participating in it lived in the huts and cabins which, under the old régime, had been inhabited by their slave ancestors. As these fell to pieces others, cheaper and less soundly built, were constructed to take their place.

The crop-sharing system, economically debilitating though it was,

55. *Ibid.*

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Parents are generally kind to their children, so far as physical
855 punishment is concerned. The average peasant child can hardly
861 properly be said to be "brought up": he merely grows, eats whatever
157 his family eats or whatever fruits he can pick up, and learns his place in the community as he matures. In anger, parents are likely to use in correction the first thing that comes to hand. There is a surprising callousness to pain among these generally kindly people: they beat their donkeys unmercifully, and strap harness over open sores; they carry chickens, head down and feet tied together and mouths gaping, for miles in the sun; they revel in gory cockfights. If, therefore, a parent is minded to beat his child, he will probably do a thorough
[578] job of it. A peasant woman, pommeling her son with a broomstick, replied to the protests of a white passer-by, "*Li nègue; li pas fait li mal.*" ("He's a Negro; it won't hurt him.") The interference of a stranger in the beating of a wife by her man, armed with a club, was resented by both man and woman as an interference with a purely family quarrel.

831 The concept of sexual continence is lacking among the peasants.
834 Sex, indeed, hardly enters the realm of morality except in connection
864 with adulterous dalliance of one man with another's woman. There is no virtue in abstaining from sex relations when the sexual urge is strong. Mothers tell love stories in all their frank details to their young daughters, and some who care about such matters are adept in all lore connected with stimulating and satisfying a man's desire.[5]
[342] Since huts are small and the whole family sleeps in the same room, children have ample opportunity to observe the sexual life of their parents. If a girl, as a result of her own experiments, has a child born to her, there is no disgrace. Practically every peasant is "illegitimate," so that the term means nothing; a baby will soon be old enough to assist in the work of the home, thus becoming an asset. It is expected that as soon as a youth grows up he will find a mate and begin a family of his own.

● 241 The family is as important an element of peasant life as formal
439 marriage is unimportant. It is the economic unit. Ever since the days
593 of Pétion Haitian economy has been one of small things: even the crops are small subsistence crops of maize, millet, beans, rice, yams, and frequently trees of bananas, plantains, and coffee, which require no particular cultivation. Enough coffee has been produced in Haiti for annual export ever since 1804, but until recent years the beans

5. See Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 22 ff.

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have been gathered from trees which grew wild. Both men and women labor, with the work divided according to regular custom between the sexes, the men dominating the scene only in the marketing of coffee.

Nature was opulent enough at the beginning of Haitian independence. The wars had ruined irrigation ditches, sugar refineries, and mechanical equipment, but the soil was still abundantly fertile. But generations of farming by people without knowledge of fertilization or soil conservation have worn out much of the land. Trees have been cut to provide lumber and clearings for more farms; in the rainy seasons torrents have coursed down the mountainsides, washing away soil and exposing the earth to the rays of a tropical sun. Because the country is overpopulated every available acre is put to use, and to overuse, thus still more depleting the land. It is a vicious circle, for the next generation must extract yet more from the earth and so weaken it further. Hard work is the lot of the peasant, therefore, during every month of the year except the dry season. There has never been a formal rotation of crops: a farmer continues to plant the same crop in the same field until the harvest is perceptibly smaller than before. Then he changes to another type of produce. Sooner or later he will allow the land to lie fallow for several years until, by the action of nature or the grazing over it of cattle, it has regained a measure of its fertility.

The strenuous work of clearing fields and preparing them for cultivation is man's job. Since the peasants owned their plots it has almost always been done in coöperation by the men of the neighborhood. What on the American frontier would have been called a "bee" is known in Haiti as a *coumbite*, or *combite*, often carried on as an enterprise of the local *Société Congo*, the informal neighborhood group for mutual aid and fellowship.[6]

A man who has a large job on hand announces a coumbite for any day except Sunday, always a day of rest, and whatever other week-

6. The word "coumbite" was apparently borrowed from the Spanish part of the island, and from the Spanish word *convidar*, convey. In Colombia "convite" means exactly what "coumbite" means in Haiti: a gathering of peasants to work in common, or else a coöperative society for mutual agricultural self-help.

Professor Herskovits (*Life in a Haitian Valley*, chap. IV) describes the Société Congo in detail. The use of the name "Congo" indicates the African tradition, and is particularly noteworthy in connection with a kind of coöperative work which Herskovits finds particularly Dahomean.

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day local practice dedicates to work in one's own fields—generally Monday or Tuesday. The prospect of working with one's fellows, of a midday feast with plentiful drink, of singing, talking, and hearing the news, is enough to induce most of the neighbors to come, even though the work will be hard. As with American log-rollings and house-raisings, there is a practical reason for accepting the invitation: by participating in other coumbites a man will be able to invite his neighbors to help him in his own larger tasks. The work is done in rhythm[7] as on Southern road gangs in the United States, with one man specially designated to beat the drum, blow the conch, or sing a topical song, to set the pace. While the men are at work, the women prepare the noonday feast.

This typical characteristic of Haitian rural life has been described in detail as it operates near the village of Mirebalais by Prof. Melville J. Herskovits. His contention is that the custom, in general and in detail, derives from Dahomey, West Africa, the home of many of the original slaves.[8] Although his evidence is impressive, there are nevertheless objections to it. Coöperative enterprise for tasks larger than one man can accomplish alone is common in the United States and in parts of Europe and South America, as well as in Africa. It is not an economic device which strikes one as requiring unusual inventiveness, for cases of it are common even where the participants have had no previous experience of it. Further, Dahomean practice could not have been kept up during slave days, nor yet during the régimes of Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion. (The first three required forced labor under overseers, and landownership by peasants was still rare under Pétion, although a beginning had been made.) In the thirty years from 1790, when the last slaves arrived, until Christophe died in 1820, many old ways were certainly forgotten. Not a single one of the numerous books written by visitors during Boyer's quarter-century, 1818 to 1843, mentions the practice, which certainly must have struck Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Americans if it had been characteristic of the peasant life of the time. If one concludes that the coumbite did not become peasant practice until the mid-nineteenth century, all possibility of contact with Negroes familiar with Dahomean routine has disappeared. What

7. A Haitian poet, Charles F. Pressoir, entitles a book of his verses *Au Rythme des coumbites* (Port-au-Prince, 1933).
8. *Op. cit.*, chap. IV.

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remains is the verbal handing down of recollections, one of the most natural things in the world and one congenial to Haitian peasants. Every region, every village, has its accomplished storytellers. The phenomenal resemblances in detail of the coumbite to Dahomean coöperative work may be due therefore to this verbal tradition.

Once the men have cleared and prepared the field, the care of the crop devolves upon the women. For this there has been a long background of tradition. In African agricultural regions, in the plantations of Saint-Domingue during slave days, under the forced labor régimes of Toussaint and his successors, women had been field workers. They had never known anything else. We have seen that many of the present-day practices of Haiti go back to the times of Pétion and Boyer: during this period women did field work, not by decree of government but by force of circumstance. Their men were constantly taken away from the farms for service in the large army; if crops were to be raised, women must do the work. Sometimes soldiers were stationed near their own homes, and could help in production; but they could be called on to march, at short notice and in peacetime, anywhere in the country. Many of the later presidents made it a definite policy frequently to change the station of regiments, so as to prevent revolutionary projects and guard against the soldiers' being tampered with by the disaffected in any single community.

Sir Harry Johnston records his observations on the Haiti of 1910 as follows:

> The women are the best part of the nation. They are splendid, unremitting toilers. In the face of all discouragements with which a bad Government clouds their existence the women of Haiti remind one of certain patient types of ant or termite, who, as fast as you destroy their labour of months or days, hasten to repair it with unslackening energy. The market-women that descend from the country farms to the Haitian towns know that on their way to the market-place, and in that market-place, they will be robbed by soldiers and officers until the margin of profit on the sale of their wares has practically disappeared. Yet they continue to toil, to raise poultry and cattle, till the fields, see to their gardens, make pottery and mats. They cannot stop to reason, but must go on working from three years old to the end of their lives. Such industry (which is almost equally supplemented by that of the peasant husbands) protected should make Haiti one of the richest countries in the world for its size and population; but so long

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voluntary step towards improving themselves in any one thing. . . . Experiments may be tried, laws may be enacted, and encouragement given, but nothing short of coercion and want will impel the Haytian to labour; and I have my doubts as to the practicability of enforcing labour in Hayti until the people have been better instructed, and their characters become changed. . . . Nature is too generous to the Haytian; he never wants, and so never works for hire, as do free labourers in other countries.[13]

An American, Dr. Jonathan Brown of Philadelphia, in 1837 published a volume which in most respects seems quite dispassionate. He says:

The females are compelled to perform most of the labor. Those of the country employ themselves in cultivating the soil, while the men spend their time in traversing the country on horseback, in drinking, smoking, and other habits equally unprofitable. The females of the town perform all the retail traffic of the country. . . . They derive a subsistence for themselves and for their families.[14]

Boyer's secretary of state, Inginac, tried by means of a pamphlet—which few Haitians could have read—to urge the peasants of 1840 to greater activity. He says that although coffee is the chief source of Haitian wealth, although every day small properties have been multiplied, although times are improving, yet the old routines are still followed in coffee cultivation, as if the men would never work and "as if the Haitians were not susceptible of making any progress in the sciences."[15]

In 1842 an English Quaker, John Candler, wrote that without a modicum of labor the peasants could not subsist at all; "but they do not, and they will not, work hard to please anybody, and hence agriculture languishes, and commerce is stationary."[16] Finally, in 1860, Benjamin Hunt, an American, remarked: "If one wants to be lazy, Hayti is the place. It is possible to get through the day with little annoyance from cold, hunger, or the police, and with the least possible amount of work."[17] Similar testimony could be greatly multiplied. It is only in recent years that any author has affirmed that

13. *The Present State of Hayti*, pp. 359–362.
14. *The History and Present Condition of St. Domingo*, II, 281.
15. Joseph Balthasar Inginac, "*Culture du caffier et préparation de la fève pour être livrée au commerce*" [a pamphlet], (Port-au-Prince, 1840), p. 1.
16. *Brief Notices of Hayti*, p. 38.
17. *Remarks on Hayti as a Place of Settlement for Afric-Americans*, p. 12.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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178 65 it. Moreover, the Haitian budget is in the neighborhood of seven million dollars, for which sum not much in the way of great improvement for three million people can be expected. The task of regenerating Haiti calls for self-sacrificing genius—at present the élite hardly qualify either as self-denying servants of the public or as geniuses.

175 643 642 648 ●241 Haitian affairs during the 1930's were under the direction of President Sténio Vincent, an able man to whose credit much can be said. He devoted himself to his task with assiduity, talking face to face with the peasants in Créole, urging them to assist in reforestation and to use wisdom in crop rotation. He settled serious disputes with the neighboring Dominican Republic in amicable fashion. It was he who carried on the delicate and successful negotiations with President Roosevelt to give Haiti control of her own affairs once more. In coffee culture, assistance to trade, financial matters, and other economic details, he often proceeded expertly, particularly in view of the world depression which began as he assumed office. On the other hand, Vincent made the legislature his servant rather than a partner. He was a dictator (fortunately a benevolent one) who changed the constitution by highhanded methods in order to gain his own reëlection. His régime rested upon his alliance with the efficient Garde d'Haïti. There were few signs of democracy or of respect for civil liberties, as Americans understand those terms, in Vincent's eleven years.

175 643 The spectator has a feeling that he has seen all this before, when for example Geffrard was elected to assure parliamentary government, only to become an effectively benevolent dictator as soon as the legislature opposed him. Geffrard was on the whole a good president, as Vincent was; but the former did not succeed in setting Haiti upon the path of economic and social security, and one hardly dared expect it of his modern counterpart.

175 643 648 In April, 1941, Élie Lescot, former Haitian Minister to the United States, was elected as the thirtieth president of the republic. Vincent had refused to call a plebiscite to approve an extension of his presidential term for an additional five years, as he had done in 1935 near the end of the six-year term to which he was elected in 1930. Lescot had begun his presidency with many advantages, chiefly the friendly support of his predecessor, his acquaintance with United States officials, and a recent negotiated pact by which American aid will